

Fishing Tournament Advisory Committee

April 16, 2005

10:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Best Western Royale, Stevens Point

MEETING NOTES

I. Welcome and Introductions (5 minutes)

A. Welcome and introduction of attendees.

Attendees introduced themselves. Present at the meeting were: Barry Meister, WDNR; Timothy Ebert, WDNR; Warren Zaren, Competitive American Sportfishing Tournaments; Chuck Rolfsmeyer, Bass Federation; Mike Hofmann, Wisconsin Bass Federation; Cornell Stroik, Wisconsin Bass Federation; Louie Kowieski, Great Lakes Sportfishing Federation; Robert Selk, Trout Unlimited; Steve Lindahl, Ranger Boats; Mark Soletske, NEW Tournament Trail; Ryan Richards, Wisconsin Sports Development Corporation; Steve Winters, Wisconsin Smallmouth Alliance; Brett Staplemann, Wisconsin Bowfishing Association; Bob Miller, Wisconsin Wildlife Federation; Ted Lind, Wisconsin Council of Sport Fish Organizations; John Ashenbrenner, Conservation Congress; Patrick Schmalz, WDNR.

II. WDNR Update (1.5 hours) – Patrick Schmalz, WDNR

A. Review of past rule development efforts.

Patrick Schmalz provided a brief review of the progress of rule development. He provided the attendees with a document summarizing the priorities that stemmed from past WDNR rule-making efforts regarding fishing tournaments. Schmalz noted that the committee should keep these past efforts in mind while during this current rule-making effort.

B. Current WDNR priorities.

Schmalz provided a brief summary of what were viewed as tournament rule priorities by the current WDNR tournament working group (internal committee). The WDNR working group has yet to meet. This list was generated by email inquiry with the members. Schmalz hopes to meet with the WDNR team in June.

C. Surrounding states rules.

Documentation that included the surrounding states tournament rules was provided at the March meeting, but was referred to. There was some un-focused discussion regarding the various aspects of the agenda item. In particular, Mike Hofmann mentioned that the MN Bass Federation does not like the lottery system used in the tournament permitting process in MN.

III. Fishing tournament rule development (2.5 hours)

A. Tournament definition review.

Schmalz reviewed the proposed modification to the definition of a fishing tournament discussed at the March FTAC meeting. At that time, there was agreement by the committee to modify the definition to capture more events than the current definition. Some discussion followed mainly to clarify what was recommended at the March meeting. Mark Soletske felt that any organized event should be considered a tournament for

regulation purposes. Warren Zaren commented that tournaments should be handled differently depending on whether events use private or public access. Cornell Stroik expressed concern regarding club outings and whether or not they should be brought into the tournament definition.

Discussion of Specific Regulations – the following part of the meeting was broken down by discussion of particular aspects of tournament fishing regulation.

1. Should we limit the number of tournaments? In order to get an idea of the general thought of the FTAC, a vote of members present was taken, followed by specific discussion. Voting on whether or not new tournament rules should limit the number of tournaments was 11-yes, 3-no, and 2-unknown.

Discussion

In general, it was felt that limiting the number of tournaments on some waterbodies was an important issue. It was noted that the most common complaint from members of the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation was the number of tournaments. Mike Hofmann agreed that the number of tournaments on some waters is excessive. It was felt that local fisheries biologists should be able to provide information on the impacts of tournaments on specific waters. There was some indication that perhaps consideration should be given to events run during the week or from private access sites, given that much of the issue regarding the number of tournaments is actually related to user conflict issues on the water (e.g. the number of users on the water on a given day) and user conflicts for public access (e.g. utilization of public access sites by tournament anglers). It was also noted that tournament organizers should work to be good stewards of the resource. Specifically mentioned was the Wisconsin Bass Federation. They are courteous and usually work to ensure they do not take up all the parking spots at public access sites. Based on this, it was felt by some that self-regulation was more appropriate. Others felt self-regulation was not appropriate for fishing tournament regulation. Concern was raised regarding the enforcement of rules that would specify the number of parking spots that tournament anglers could utilize. From that concern stemmed the comment from WDNR law enforcement that the department would need to rely on fishing clubs/sponsors to ‘self-police’, since our LE staff cannot possibly patrol/monitor every event. Thus it was felt that tournament rules should be enforceable/simple and that it would need to be trusted that the majority of tournament organizers will do the right thing. Despite these comments, some still felt that limiting tournament use of boat access sites was necessary and appropriate.

A slightly tangential discussion began regarding the regulation of fish handling for live release tournaments. It was suggested that the WDNR adopt the C.A.S.T. tournament booklets/training as an educational approach to fish handling. Part of the permit application process for a catch-hold-weigh-release tournament could be a plan for handling fish. A final suggestion was to give ‘best practices’ information rather than write rules for fish handling.

2. Should we limit the size of tournaments? The group suggested and then discussed specific methods for determining the maximum size a fishing tournament should be.

Discussion

It was suggested that tournament size be limited by the size of the water being fished (e.g. acres/boat). It was felt by the group that these limits should be determined differently for

open water tournaments vs. ice fishing tournaments. Specific suggestions and FTAC votes follow:

- a) No size limitations – 3
- b) 30 acres / boat (a guideline for BASS) – 8
- c) < 100 acres, 15 boat maximum, or else 10 acres / boat (similar to Iowa) – 3

After votes were cast, it was suggested that the maximum lake size to hold a tournament (20 boats) for each of the following densities:

- a) 10 acres/boat = 200 acres
- b) 15 acres/boat = 300 acres
- c) 20 acres/boat = 400 acres
- d) 30 acres/boat = 600 acres

3) Should we limit the frequency of tournaments on a given waterbody? Several suggestions were made and then voted on by the FTAC to get an idea of where the committee stood on each suggestion.

- a) None – 7
- b) Identify limits by dates (e.g. holiday weekends, etc...) – 0
- c) One weekend per month with no tournaments allowed – 0
- d) Identify limits by water – 0
- e) Not less than twice per month unless approved by the fisheries biologist – 7

Discussion

The general feeling of the FTAC was that the frequency of tournaments should be left to the discretion of the local fisheries biologist, and that those biologists need to have the flexibility to make those decisions. Another comment was that we should include lake associations in these discussions. A member of the Wisconsin Association of Lakes is on the FTAC, but has been unable to attend the last several meetings. The FTAC could seek WAL input via other methods as well (e.g. survey). WDNR has good communication with WAL.

4) How should we determine the number of tournaments allowed on a single water in the same day(s)? There were not many alternatives discussed. Instead the general feeling regarding local biologist discretion continued. The FTAC felt that biologist discretion should be allowed to determine if and how many coincidental tournaments could occur, making that decision based on access (potential user conflict and safety), lake size, and the ability of the fishery to withstand the pressure.

5) Ice fishing tournaments. A discussion began regarding the regulation of ice fishing tournaments. An initial comment was that any fees for ice fishing tournament permits should be more expensive since they generally harvest their catch. With respect to the particulars regarding size, frequency, etc... the FTAC again felt that the biologist should be given discretion to determine. A tangential comment was that it had to be clear that ice fishing tournament organizers could not restrict fishing areas (e.g. close the area to anglers not participating).

There was a question as to whether insurance should be required by rule for the tournament organizer.

B. Tournament Fees.

- **It was noted that changing the definition of a tournament would increase the number of permits. However, restrictions on size, frequency, etc... may decrease the number.**

1) It was felt that a flat fee (same for all permits) would not cut it. It was determined that the cost of dealing with permits would be approximately \$56.25).

2) Exemptions were discussed. It was felt that a permit should be required for events, such as youth and charity events, but that the permit should be free of charge.

3) Tournament stamp – there was a great deal of discussion regarding the pros and cons of establishing a stamp required to fish in a tournament (by anglers). Specific concern was expressed about ice fishing derbies that may have anglers make last-minute decisions as to whether or not they'll fish. Additionally, it is common for anglers to fish a single ice fishing derby the entire season, and that does not warrant having to buy a stamp. In response, it was suggested that the tournament stamp be required only for open water tournament anglers, exempting ice fishing tournaments and anglers. Finally it was suggested that a non-resident fee be more expensive.

C. Other priorities. No specific discussions.

IV. Next meeting (5 minutes).

The next meeting was tentatively scheduled for May 25 from 3 pm to 7 pm in Stevens Point. Schmalz noted that he would seek an alternative location because of the lunch not being provided as requested for this meeting. (This meeting was postponed until June 29).